



PEOPLE'S NEWS

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After the six-pack, the two-pack!

The so called two-pack, brokered by the Irish presidency of the European Union, which has to be ratified by governments before a final vote in the EU Parliament next month, further tightens the EU-level scrutiny of national budgets.



Euro-zone countries will now be required to submit their budget plans to the unelected EU Commission and euro finance ministers to ensure that their prop-

osals keep to the euro zone's debt and deficit limits. It also increases the Commission's supervision over countries receiving a bail-out, including obligations on governments to address the weakest sectors of their economy, alongside Commission-led review missions and quarterly reporting—resembling a permanent troika.

The two-pack follows the six-pack that entered into force on 13 December 2011, which gives the Commission the power to request additional cuts to national budgets that it considers to be unrealistic. It can also impose fines for non-compliance with plans to reduce deficits and debt.

A draft declaration by the Commission on the two-pack, which has been seen by Open Europe, states that once the legislation is adopted the Commission “intends to take steps in the short term towards a deep and genuine economic and monetary union.”

The internal document goes on to say that possible short-term steps in the next six to twelve months include a redemption fund and

euro bills, but these would be under “rigorous conditions.” It says the Commission considers that “the required deeper integration of financial regulation, fiscal and economic policy and corresponding instruments must be accompanied by commensurate political integration.”

The declaration also says that the Commission is “committed to put forward explicit ideas for treaty changes” before the 2014 EU Parliament elections.

Thomas Pringle a guest of the Swedish People's Movement

Thomas Pringle TD, a patron of the People's Movement, was in Sweden recently at the invitation of the Swedish People's Movement. During his visit he spoke to leaders of the main opposition Social Democratic Labour and Left Parties. Both parties are now deciding what stand to take on the right-wing government's plan for the country to sign up to the EU's Permanent Austerity Pact.

Thomas also addressed an enthusiastic meeting of activists in ABF House, Stockholm's main trade union centre.

The Swedish parliament, the Riksdag will vote on the Permanent Austerity Treaty on 9 March. Sweden is not in the euro zone, and there is therefore no good reason why it should sign the treaty. The only argument put forward by the government is that Sweden would be able to sit with the new Euro Council once per year, while the articles in the pact are not binding on Sweden.

The Swedish People's Movement is prominent in the opposition to the Permanent Austerity Pact. Twenty-two trade union and social

groups have signed its “No to the Austerity Pact” appeal. Among them are the national trade unions for electricians, dockers, and transport workers, as well as the Left Party and Social Democrat EU critics. The Left and Green Parties will probably vote against ratification. The Swedish Democrats, which the People’s Movement will not work with because of its anti-immigrant stance but which has the support of almost a tenth of the electorate, will also vote against ratification.

The Social Democrats, under a new Europhile chairperson, Stefan Löfven, will probably support the government. Nevertheless, Thomas had a productive meeting with the chairperson of the Social Democratic women’s organisation, Lena Sommerstad. He also met the general secretary of the Left Party, Stellan Hermansson, and party’s MEP Mikael Gustafsson.



The activist meeting was chaired by the journalist and author Björn Elmbrant (above left). Last autumn Elmbrant’s new book, *Det Som Skulle Bli Så Bra* (“It should have been so good”), was published. It describes the consequences of permanent austerity demanded by the Troika, and puts the austerity measures in a political context. He visited all the so-called PIIGS countries when writing his book, and, needless to say, the book contains an “Irish chapter.”

Elmbrant captured the sentiments of the meeting when he praised Thomas’s courage in challenging the legality of the European Stability Mechanism all the way to the European Court of Justice.

Germany says it does not want to rule EU by diktat

In his first speech on the EU the president of Germany, Joachim Gauck, has told crisis-hit countries that there is no threat of them being ruled by “German diktat.” Eleven months in office, the avowed pro-European said there is a growing frustration among EU citizens, fuelled by daily reports about the euro crisis, bail-outs, and summit diplomacy.

“In some member-states people are afraid of becoming the paymasters of the crisis. In other countries there is a growing fear of constant austerity measures and social decline. To many EU citizens, giving and taking, borrowing and lending, responsibility and contribution seem no longer rightly and fairly divided within the community of Europeans.”

He said the new mistrust comes on top of older anti-EU sentiments: dislike of Brussels red tape, its lack of transparency, the growing power of the EU Council, and the Franco-German tandem overpowering smaller members.



Alluding to Greek protesters’ recent depictions of Angela Merkel as a Nazi, Gauck said he was “startled” to learn that some people in southern EU countries think Germany is enforcing austerity in a “criminal” way and trying to create a “German Europe.”

“I want to reassure all citizens in neighbouring countries: I don’t see anyone among policy-makers in Germany who is aiming for a German diktat. We do not want to intimidate others or to force our ideas onto them, but we stand by our experiences, and we would like to share them,” he said.

Meanwhile the president of Italy, Giorgio Napolitano, while on a trip to Germany, demanded respect for Italy and cancelled a meeting with the German opposition leader after he mocked the Italian election results.

The gaffe-prone Peer Steinbrück, chairperson of the the Social-Democrat Party, who will be challenging Angela Merkel in the general election in September, had told a party rally in Potsdam that he was “appalled, to some extent, that two clowns have won the elections in Italy.”

When is a “ban” not a ban?

Question: When is a “ban” not a ban? Answer: When it is an EU ban.

As the EU horse-meat scandal spreads and spreads, Simon Coveney, one of the EU agriculture ministers in the eye of that particular storm, was obviously relieved to have good news to announce to the always credulous media.

In the early hours of 27 February ministers had agreed “to ban the practice of discarding fish at sea.” Fish get dumped under the EU Common Fisheries Policy if the fisherman has caught more of them over a given period than he has been allowed. He does so because if he landed them in an EU country he would be liable to a criminal prosecution and a fine.

He dumps, notwithstanding the quantity of fish he trawls, whether the fish were caught on purpose or as an accident in netting other fish in the same part of the sea, and notwithstanding what a trawler from another country fishing a few hundred yards away may be allowed to do with his caught fish. An estimated 40 to 60 per cent of all fish caught by EU states is discarded, with the proportion believed to be as high as 70 to 90 per cent in some areas.

Simon Coveney was in the chair at the EU meeting because of Ireland’s current six-month presidency of the EU.

But was it a ban? And is that the end of the story?

What in fact the fisheries ministers decided was to allow the discarding of up to 7 per cent of all fish caught, after a phase-in period that allows for 9 per cent for two years and then 8 per cent for two more years, beginning with a “ban” on discards in 2014 for pelagic fish and then gradually introducing it for “species defining the fisheries” in other waters between 2015 and 2017 and for other species by 2019.

7 per cent corresponds to 355,000 tonnes of fish each year, based on Commission figures for 2009. So by no stretch of the imagination is it a complete ban.

And this is not the end of the story. Coveney still has to bring about an agreement between the European Council and the EU Parliament. Negotiations between the Parliament and the Council on the basic regulation of the Common Fisheries Policy will begin in a few weeks, with the aim of reaching agreement by June or July. The Parliament wants a ban on discards, with no exceptions, for all harvested species, to be introduced between 2014 and 2017.

Negotiations between the two EU bodies will be fraught, to say the least.

Coveney has promised a new fund to be made available to support fishermen as they adjust to landing what they catch. This will be the newly created European Maritime Fisheries Fund, “to help fishermen adjust to the new regime.” The fund is expected to have a budget of €6.7 billion as part of the 2014–2020 EU budget framework and is to be used to pay for nets and equipment for small-scale coastal fleets.

Like the more recent EU-dictated blanket bank guarantee, Irish people recognise more and more that they were “had” on the fisheries part of EU membership. There is now a remarkably broad party-political consensus in support of the Irish fishing industry, but an unwillingness to translate that support into any sort of united political campaigning.

Ireland has a long historical tradition as a fishing country. Its experience of the Common Fisheries Policy has not been a good one. The People's Movement believes that the policy has been an expensive, cumbersome, bureaucratic failure and that Ireland could manage its fisheries better outside the Common Fisheries Policy.

The People's Movement believes that, as a general principle, centralising more power in Brussels and further EU integration means less democracy and less say and control by Irish citizens; that a democratic and stable Europe demands the reversal of EU integration and repatriation to the member-states of powers already surrendered.

This general principle has a clear relevance in relation to the future of the CFP. Fisheries are best managed by governments co-operating at a regional scale. Any regional model must restore genuine management and decision-making powers to the member-states. This is because fisheries measures are best developed by those most familiar with the fisheries, the stock distribution, the fleets and gears, the marine habitats and climatic conditions. Measures need to be developed, therefore, for individual fisheries if they are to succeed in achieving sustainability and eradicating discards.

The centralised approach of the CFP leads to general regulations being agreed at the EU level. This has led to very detailed and complex regulation, difficult for fishermen to follow and for enforcement agencies to ensure compliance. The body of regulations that emerges sometimes has more to do with a political project than with real fisheries management needs.

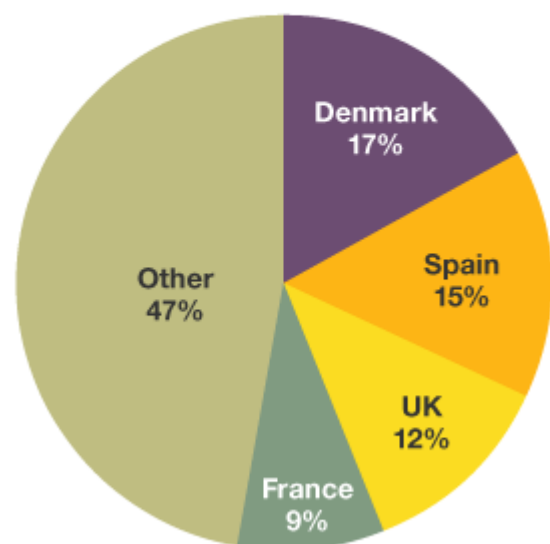
The best scale at which to manage fisheries is the most appropriate environmental unit for the fish stock. For many of the demersal species within EU waters this could be at the scale of sea basins, such as the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the Celtic Sea. For migratory stocks, such as mackerel, the scale is larger,

while for more sedentary shellfish stocks the management unit may be more local.

A fully centralised, effectively policed fisheries management regime might work if it was ruthlessly managed and controlled by a huge policing operation. National regimes in Norway and Iceland have been shown to be effective. Yet the CFP is the worst of both options. The discarding of unwanted catches is a complex issue exacerbated by the Common Fisheries Policy.

Fishing catches by EU27 countries, 2010

Total catch: 4.9 million tonnes



Source: Eurostat

Inshore boats have smaller nets in which fish are not crushed tightly together; undersized fish can often be thrown back while still alive. The bigger the net, the more fish are thrown back into the sea dead. Yet as fish becomes scarce, vessels become bigger and more powerful, and there is little incentive to use types of net that minimise the level of discards.

More generally, it has long been accepted that the involvement of fishermen in the design and implementation of fisheries management policies leads to more effective management

measures, and the use of incentives further aids acceptance and compliance.

The rigidity of the CFP has stifled innovation both at the national and the individual scale. This rigidity is a consequence of the centralising regulatory detail that is such a central component of the EU decision-making process.

Clearly, a policy that sought to reverse this centralisation, with the restoration of decision-making to member-states, will unbind blanket restrictions and lead to the development of regionally more appropriate management measures.

Commission takes Britain to European court over VAT

The British government is being taken to the European Court of Justice by the European Commission for offering reduced VAT rates to encourage home-owners to make their houses more energy-efficient.

The Commission claimed this week that, under EU rules, such reductions in VAT must be linked to “social policy.” The Treasury said it would defend the reduced VAT for energy-saving materials but withdraw the reduced rate from 2013 for buildings used only for charitable purposes.

Meanwhile the Commission will take France and Luxembourg to court for having lower than usual VAT rates for e-books.

Survey shows half British people would vote to leave the EU

Only one in three British people would vote to remain in the EU according to an opinion poll for the *Financial Times*. Given a straight choice in a referendum tomorrow, 50 per cent would vote for leaving and 33 per cent for remaining in, while 17 per cent would not vote either way.

The prime minister, David Cameron, has promised to hold a referendum in 2017. This promise is very popular with the electorate,

with 50 per cent supporting the decision and only 21 per cent opposing it. It would be the first national referendum on Europe since 1975, when Harold Wilson, the Labour Party prime minister, put membership of the European Economic Community to the public.



During his speech, Cameron also said he would be able to convince the public of the merits of staying in the EU

so long as he can renegotiate the relationship. However, of those who would vote for leaving, only 12 per cent said they would “definitely” change their minds if there were a successful renegotiation; another 47 per cent said “yes, possibly” to the idea that they could alter their vote. But 41 per cent of those wanting Britain to leave would definitely not change their point of view.

Voters ranked the EU at 14th in a list of 15 priorities for Britain, with health, education and economic growth in the first three slots.

A final blow to “social Europe”

The president of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi, told the *Wall Street Journal* a year ago that “the European social model has already gone.” In truth, the former Goldman Sachs banker who now controls the euro—free from all political and democratic constraints, in line with EU treaties—no longer felt the need to go along with the fantasy that such a “social model” even existed in the first place.

The reality is that the “European social model,” which claimed that the “social partners”—trade unions and big business—were equal and had common interests, were “all in it together,” in the new parlance, was always an aspirational myth rather than something rooted in reality. In fact there are many differing social models in Europe, built up in member-states over decades and even centuries in order to manage industrial

relations and disputes between employers and workers.

If anything, the EU Court of Justice (not to be confused with the European Court of Human Rights, which is not part of the EU) has sought to undermine best practices employed in Scandinavian countries and to hand more powers to business to carry out social dumping. This is a means of reducing labour costs either by employing migrant labour within a country on lower pay than provided for by national labour agreements or by exporting production to countries where labour costs are lower. In both cases, unions' power to protect workers' rights through collective bargaining is sidelined or attacked.

Nevertheless, the ICTU doggedly continues to claim, most notably during debates on the Lisbon Treaty, that support for EU structures and treaties will bring more benefits to workers than disadvantages, in the name of "social Europe." It is a claim that had worn thin by the time the referendum on the Austerity Treaty rolled around, though it was still trotted out by hard-line Europhiles in the public-sector unions.

With intense support from some trade union leaderships in Continental Europe, Draghi is confident enough to kill off social Europe and announce that there will be "no escape" from tough austerity measures for workers in order to save the banks that created the single currency.



Nowhere is the illusory nature of "social Europe" so clearly laid bare than in the various EU directives emanating from Brussels that claim to defend workers. For instance, the Agency Workers Regulations were once heralded by EU enthusiasts as proof of the good intentions of the unelected European commissioners. Yet, while they purport to protect agency workers, the overwhelming effect of the directive has been to normalise

and institutionalise casualised labour. Those in the labour movement who hoped that the regulations would provide agency workers with a safety net have found that the so-called "Swedish derogation" is being used aggressively by agencies and users of agency work to keep down pay.

The Swedish derogation is a mechanism lodged within the regulations that says that if the agency sets up a permanent employment contract with the agency worker, who is then hired out to a user-firm, there is no obligation to ensure that the agency worker receives basic pay and conditions comparable to a permanent worker on a similar job.

According to a survey carried out in Britain for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 28 per cent of agencies have adopted this model. Our own Department of Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation says that "for the multinational sector, the value of agency working as a complementary work force to service peaks and troughs of business without the overhead of employee headcount is hugely valued," and it continues with the well-worn mantra "Without this flexibility, Ireland as a location for future investment will lose an important aspect of market flexibility."

It states that in general, estimates obtained from private employment agencies suggest that temporary agency workers account for approximately 2 per cent of the working population, which in Ireland now amounts to approximately 35,000 agency workers.

The full implications of the "Swedish derogation" are still unclear, but the advantages it offers to businesses seeking to pay less to temporary labour is already being promoted in Britain by specialist workshops.

This extension of agency labour at the heart of the directive explains the reaction of Norwegian trade unions, which organised a general strike last year against its imposition. The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions is demanding that the government reject the

directive and introduce laws to ensure that wages and working conditions for those who are hired are the same as for permanent employees.

Unions argue that the directive undermines Norwegian labour laws and introduces a large-scale use of temporary and agency workers, forcing out permanent workers and weakening workers' rights and collective agreements.

The directive also gives final authority over employment legislation to EU courts, which have already struck down trade union collective bargaining rights in Sweden and Finland in the Laval and Viking cases.

Backing the strike in Norway, the International Transport Workers' Federation said that Norway's legislation on contract labour and temporary employment was some of the best there is. "The directive doesn't just risk taking a good law and making it mediocre: it could also strip the rights now enjoyed by workers and open the floodgates to their replacement by precariously employed temporary and agency staff, who will themselves get inferior employment protection." That, of course, is what the directive is designed to do in the first place.

Is the European Union a growing threat to peace?

The popular myth about the European Union is that it is a benign international body that brings together the peoples of Europe in a common trading bloc, where everybody benefits. It promotes a pan-European identity—a kind of regional internationalism—and helps to maintain peace, security and welfare throughout Europe. But what is the real story?

In the EU, austerity and its attendant misery is the only game in town. It's written into the treaties and is enforced on every member-country in virtually every branch of the economy. The EU's decisions are taken by the Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Central Bank, and the European

Court of Justice. None of these are elected or accountable to the "citizens" of the EU. The European Parliament is elected but has few powers and can only amend legislation, not initiate it.

The EU's democratic deficit is no accident. It has been carefully fashioned to bypass the democracy of member-states to serve the interests of Europe's elite and biggest trans-national firms.



From its origins, the EU was always, at least in part, a military project. The real purpose of the first supranational body, the European Coal and Steel Community of 1951, was to facilitate German rearmament at the beginning of the "Cold War" and at the same time assuage French fears over the danger of resurgent German militarism. Above all else, the United States wanted a rearmed West Germany inside NATO.

Subsequent treaty revisions—especially the Amsterdam and Lisbon Treaties—have steadily strengthened the military role of the EU. It now has a Common Security and Defence Policy and a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security. It sees its main threats as terrorism, nuclear proliferation (though not its own), regional conflict, energy security, and cyber-attack.

The Lisbon Treaty sets out clear military obligations on the part of EU member-states to "make civilian and military capacity available to the Union for the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy ... Member States shall undertake progressively to improve

their military capabilities.” This should be a particular problem for those states with a policy of military neutrality, such as Finland, Ireland, Austria, and Sweden, though they participate in EU battle groups, fobbing off critics with an insidious form of Orwellian peace-think.

EU military capacities now consist of thirteen “battle groups,” battalion-sized forces of 1,500 each, two of which are on stand-by at any time and can be despatched within a few days. Since 2003 the EU has been involved in military missions in more than nineteen countries on three continents—Bosnia, Macedonia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Palestine, Kosovo, Guinea-Bissau, Somalia, Sudan, Chad, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Libya, Iraq, Indonesia, Afghanistan, and Mali.

These missions range from “Petersburg tasks,” including humanitarian, rescue, peace-keeping and peace-making operations, to military training and full-scale war; and there is nothing benign about these missions. They exist to support EU foreign policy when diplomacy fails—and to enforce the neo-liberal policies of free trade, privatisation, deregulation and austerity outside Europe as aggressively as they are imposed inside it.

But EU forces are intended to complement rather than replace NATO. Indeed there is a new emphasis on interoperability and integration with NATO. The EU intervenes only where NATO chooses not to. Despite its size and economic strength, the EU has limited capacity to fight wars—except on a very small scale—outside its own area. It lacks essential resources for larger operations, such as smart bombs, air-to-air refuelling, intelligence, reconnaissance, drones, and heavy-lift capacity. Not so NATO. It dwarfs the EU as a military force and takes precedence over it on most occasions.

There is, of course, a considerable overlap between NATO and the EU membership. Twenty-one states are members of both organ-

isations, but by far the most important difference is that NATO is clearly transatlantic and is dominated by the world’s only military superpower: the United States.

The alliance was conceived in the early days of the Cold War, ostensibly to counter the Soviet “threat” to western Europe; but its steady expansion eastwards and southwards more than twenty years after the Cold War reveals its true purpose. It is not for countering any perceived threat to Europe or North America. NATO’s Strategic Concept admits that the risk of this is “low.” It is a vehicle for binding member-countries into support for US foreign policy and for global intervention. In November 2010 it reaffirmed the concept of nuclear “deterrence” and the first use of nuclear weapons. In addition, it committed itself to building a new and destabilising missile defence system to cover the continent of Europe, adding a new twist to the nuclear arms race.



Today, from Afghanistan to Kosovo, from the Mediterranean to the Horn of Africa, 138,000 NATO personnel are engaged in military action. But NATO is not a monolithic bloc. Ten years ago, serious differences emerged over the war in Iraq between the “old Europe” of France and Germany and the “new Europe” of eastern Europe supported by Britain. More recently, differences have appeared over who is doing the fighting in Afghanistan and who is not and about whether to recruit new members, such as Georgia, to the alliance.

The Franco-German axis would still like to promote the EU as a military counterweight to the United States—a rival imperialism—but for the moment they are in a minority.

Europe and America—crippled by debt and recession—are empires in decline. NATO and EU armed forces will continue to threaten peace and stability throughout the world; but clearly they represent the past, not the future.

EU should arm Malian soldiers!



The head of the EU training mission to Mali says the EU should run a parallel mission to arm Malian troops. General François Lecointre, who heads the 500-strong EU training mission, says that “the European Union needs to invest today in the equipping of the Malian army and not just in its training.”

The training mission is mostly made up of German instructors but also has French, British, Polish and Irish personnel. The mission will ostensibly train the army in command and control and in logistics. It also aims to give lessons in human rights.

The EU intervention comes as some villagers are falling victim to government soldiers’ brutality. Reports have emerged that Malian soldiers are attacking members of various ethnic groups in Timbuktu and other towns, which were liberated by French air and ground strikes in recent weeks.

“Ireland shares NATO’s values”

In a recent kite-flying exercise the secretary-general of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said NATO had an “open-door policy” towards membership of the organisation. It would welcome any application by Ireland to join the organisation, he said, although he stressed that the decision to seek membership was a matter for each individual country.

“Our door remains open for European countries, European democracies that fulfil the necessary criteria and can contribute to Euro-Atlantic security, but of course it’s for individual partners to decide how they want to develop their relationship and partnership with NATO.”

He said specifically that Ireland should increase co-operation on military education, training and exercises and pointed out that the Defence Forces Ordnance School in Kildare had provided “invaluable training for NATO forces.”



Rasmussen (above left) said he would “absolutely” welcome any decision by Ireland to seek membership of NATO, though he said “it is for Ireland to decide its relationship with NATO or any other organisation ... We have a very well functioning partnership between Ireland and NATO, a partnership that fully respects Ireland’s policy of neutrality.” He added that “Ireland shares NATO’s values”—which might be a surprise to most Irish people, but then perhaps he meant Fine Gael.

While Ireland is not a member of NATO, it is certainly in the waiting-room! It has ties with

the organisation through the “Partnership for Peace,” a bilateral programme that allows for Irish forces to be used for peacekeeping and crisis management.

NATO remains the world’s largest military alliance and accounts for about half of all military spending.

More smoke and mirrors from the “paper of record”

NATO Review last month wrote about the need for “greater attention from NATO” in the Sahel in an article headed “Securing the Sahel: A role for NATO?” The writer did not employ any exaggerated rhetoric about jihadists and the like (in fact he gave priority to the non-Islamist Tuareg rebels there), but he did refer to the need for “security actors to secure shared interests”—Western actors and interests, that is.

The *Sunday Times* also displayed a franker assessment of priorities in an article that referred to David Cameron’s “fight against terrorism” in the region, “rich with oil, gas and uranium.”

Meanwhile US officials praised France for its swift military action—aided by US air-lifts and refuelling—with the rider that a more long-term military offensive was needed. The French and even the Germans have chimed in with similarly aggressive statements of intent.



This candid analysis by western powers of their interests and war-mongering intentions contrasts with the equally enthusiastic but mealy-mouthed statements of Irish ministers

and media, especially the *Irish Times*. The *Times* has been gung-ho from the start, reporting on the “murky nexus of Islamist militancy and trans-national crime that has developed in the vast deserts of the North African Sahel.”

More sophisticated, if faintly ridiculous, commentary has come from Fintan O’Toole who argued that the war in Mali was one to save the country’s musical tradition and art from Islamic iconoclasts in a column headed “This time it really is a war to save civilisation.” As music-loving French soldiers, with the backing of big-band US air-lifts, poured into Mali to drive back the rebel Tuareg and Islamist militia, O’Toole wrote of a Tuareg rock band whose music he was concerned for.

From early on, the paper’s editorials urged Irish participation in the military training mission in Mali. In one such editorial, headed “Burning books,” the *Times* cited the destruction of Timbuktu’s archives—a report that RTÉ dismissed as greatly exaggerated a day or so later. And the fact that the Malian government is a military regime brought to power by a military coup, with the support of France, does not seem to bother the *Times*’s European liberals.

So, Ireland becoming involved in Mali and wider north-west Africa is, according to David Cameron, involving ourselves in a “generational struggle,” and we might be in it for the long haul.

Snippets

- **Ireland ranks number 1** among the twenty-seven EU countries for transposing the EU internal-market directives into national law, both in their number and in the speed of adoption. Ireland transposed all internal-market directives on time. Belgium, despite its position at the heart of the European Union, came bottom of the list.
- **A referendum is likely to be needed** to ratify the new EU-wide patents system, to come into

force next year. There may well be disadvantages in it for some countries. The relevant points read:

“Currently businesses and individuals who wish to protect their intellectual property across the EU have to apply for patents in each of the 27 EU member states separately, a procedure which can involve significant administrative and translation costs. However, some commentators have argued that while the costs may go down for companies that want to register their patents in a large number of member states, it may in fact increase for companies who only want to register their patents in a small number of countries. The level of renewal fees has yet to be set.”

- **And Olli Rehn resurfaces.** In a **speech** on the future of the euro, the EU commissioner for economic and monetary affairs said: “We

envisage EU treaty change in eighteen months to five years. For the short term (six to eighteen months) we foresee several concrete proposals within the current treaties, starting with the banking union.” But he added: “In the medium term (eighteen months to five years) we could envisage further integration involving treaty changes.” So maybe there’s another referendum on the way?

- **Women in Europe work 59 days a year for nothing!** 16 per cent: that’s the size of the pay gap, or the average difference between women’s and men’s average hourly earnings in the EU, according to the latest figures issued by the European Commission. The news comes before the EU’s “European Equal Pay Day.” The event marks the extra number of days that women would need to work to match the amount earned by men, at present fifty-nine days, meaning that this year the day falls on 28 February.